

Macbeth

ADVANCED PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH
LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

STUDY GUIDE
STUDENT COPY

Act I, scene i

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating by beginning the play with this scene?
2. What do you suppose is suggested by the line, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"?
3. What poetic device is used in this scene and to what effect?

Act I, scene ii

1. What is the purpose of this early scene?
2. What image do we have of Macbeth's bravery and ability as a warrior?
3. What is his relationship to King Duncan?
4. Whom had Macbeth and Banquo been fighting?
5. What does King Duncan tell Ross to do?

Act I, scene iii

1. What does the audience learn about the Weird Sisters from their conversation at the beginning of the scene?
2. When Macbeth says, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," to what is he referring? What could be the dramatic irony in this line?
3. Describe the physical appearance of the Weird Sisters.
4. What prophecies do the Weird Sisters make regarding Macbeth? How does he react?
5. What do the Weird Sisters see in the future for Banquo?
6. How do Macbeth and Banquo react to the experience after the Weird Sisters vanish?

7. What "terms" does Ross indicate accompany the title Thane of Cawdor?
8. As the others talk, what does Macbeth's aside reveal about his thinking?
9. How does Banquo's comment support the "Fair is foul, foul is fair" theme?
10. What does Macbeth mean in his aside about two truths being prologue to the act of the imperial theme?
11. What dramatic conventions does Shakespeare use to establish character and begin to lay out his tragedy?

4. In his last speech in this scene, what does Macbeth reveal?

Act I, scene v

1. What is the purpose of the letter?
2. What do we learn about Macbeth from Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter?
3. What do we learn about Lady Macbeth from her reaction to the letter?
4. Does Lady Macbeth fear Macbeth will not be king if he does not murder Duncan?
5. How does the news about King Duncan's expected arrival affect her? What is she planning?
6. Why does Lady Macbeth pray to be unsexed?
7. What does Shakespeare establish in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's first exchange when Macbeth arrives home?
8. In what way does Lady Macbeth's advice to Macbeth relate to the "fair is foul" theme?

Act I, scene vi

1. What is the purpose of this brief scene?

2. How does this scene contribute to the "fair is foul" theme?

Act I, scene vii

1. What arguments does Macbeth raise for not doing it?
2. What does he finally conclude?
3. What consequences does Macbeth fear if he commits the murder?
4. What does Lady Macbeth say in an attempt to goad her husband into the murder?
5. Macbeth's response to her about what a man may dare is frequently quoted. What is his meaning?
6. What is the point of Lady Macbeth's baby imagery? Note the many times images of babies and mothers are presented in this play.
7. What exposition does Shakespeare give the audience in this scene?

Act II, scene i

1. What is significant about the weather?
2. What do you suppose is keeping Banquo from sleeping?
3. What is significant about Macbeth's saying, "I think not of them," after Banquo had admitted to dreaming about the Weird Sisters?
4. What does Macbeth mean when he says to Banquo, "If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, / It shall make honour for you"?
5. What is significant about Banquo's reply?
6. In his soliloquy after Banquo leaves, what does Macbeth tell us he sees? What could account for this apparition?
7. Why does Shakespeare have Macbeth hallucinate?

Act II, scene ii

1. Compare Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's reactions immediately after the crime.
2. Why does Lady Macbeth not commit the murder when she is in the room?
3. Macbeth, apparently troubled by the murder he has just committed, tells Lady Macbeth what he saw and heard. She tells him, "These deeds must not be thought of this way." Why?
4. Macbeth's response is frequently quoted. What is the sense of this response?
5. How does Lady Macbeth get Duncan's blood on her hands?
6. What does Macbeth's refusal to return to Duncan's chamber echo?

Act II, scene iii

1. The Porter's scene, or the "knocking at the gate," is a much debated scene by scholars, but many agree it is the typical comic relief scene seen in Shakespeare's plays. What do you suppose the dramatic purpose of a comic relief scene is? Why is the Porter's soliloquy in prose rather than poetry? What lines contain the bawdy humor so often found in these scenes?
2. How is the theme of "a crime against nature" reinforced in this scene?
3. What does Shakespeare accomplish with Macduff's allusion to "a new Gorgon"?
4. How does Macbeth react to the discovery of Duncan's body?
5. How does Lady Macbeth react?

6. Who is the one who points out the inappropriateness of Lady Macbeth's initial response?

7. What is the predominant image in this scene, and what effect does it create?

8. What double meaning might Shakespeare have intended for Macbeth's line, "He does: he did appoint so," in response to Lennox's asking, "Goes the King hence today?"

Act III, scene i

1. In his soliloquy, what suspicion and hope does Banquo reveal?
2. Macbeth seems to be very interested in Banquo's travel plans. Why do you suppose he is so interested?
3. The speech beginning "To be thus is nothing..." is another one often quoted. What is the meaning of that sentence?
4. What is there in Banquo's character that makes Macbeth uneasy?
5. What is there in the situation with Banquo that particularly upsets Macbeth?
6. What exposition does Shakespeare offer in Macbeth's conversation with the murderers?
7. How does Macbeth convince the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance?
8. What does Macbeth tell them to do?